

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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FM USINT BAGHDAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2461

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BAGHDAD 1077

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS

SUBJECT: INITIAL IMPRESSIONS OF THE IRAQ SCENE

1. SUMMARY: THE IRAQI REGIME IS SHREWD, TOUGH, RUTHLESS, RATHER LIMITED IN OUTLOOK AND DETERMINED TO RAISE IRAQI STANDARDS OF LIVING, ACHIEVE NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE AND GAIN INTERNATIONAL PRESTIGE. ALTHOUGH THEIR ACTIONS ARE CLOAKED IN IDEOLOGICAL RHETORIC, THEIR DECISIONS OFTEN REFLECT AN UNDERLYING PRAGMATIC REALISM. DESPITE THEIR INFLAMMATORY RHETORIC ON ARAB-ISRAELI ISSUES, THEY ARE AWARE OF THEIR NEED FOR PEACE IN THE AREA TO PRESERVE THEIR GROWING COMMERCIAL TIES WITH THE U.S. AND OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES. TRENDS IN U.S. - IRAQI RELATIONS ARE IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION, BUT IT WILL BE A SLOW PROCESS AND NO MAJOR CHANGES

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APPEAR IMMINENT. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING MY FIRST FEW DAYS IN BAGHDAD I HAVE GATHERED THE FOLLOWING IMPRESSIONS OF THE SITUATION IN IRAQ. DURING THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS I HOPE TO FIND OPPORTUNITIES TO TEST AND DEVELOP THESE OBSERVATIONS MORE THOROUGHLY. FOR NOW HOWEVER, THEY ARE MY BEST JUDGMENT OF THE IRAQI SCENE.

3. NATURE OF REGIME:THE IRAQI REGIME IS CONTROLLED BY A SMALL CLOSELY KNIT CLIQUE OF SHREWD, RUTHLESS AND RELATIVELY YOUNG MEN WHO HAVE VERY LIMITED AND FREQUENTLY FALLACIOUS PERCEPTIONS OF THE WORLD OUTSIDE OF IRAQ. THEY MAINTAIN POWER BY CLASSIC POLICE STATE TECHNIQUES INCLUDING TERROR AND THE STRICT CONTROL OF ALL PUBLIC MEDIA. THEIR PUBLIC EXPRESSIONS ARE COUCHED IN A HALF DIGESTED PSEUDO-MARXIST JARGON WHICH, WHEN COMBINED WITH THE TRADITIONAL OBSCURANTISM OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE, RAISES THE ART OF INTENTIONAL OBFUSCATION TO NEW LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT. AT THE SAME TIME, FROM WHAT ONE CAN SEE OF THEIR ACTIONS AS OPPOSED TO THEIR RHETORIC, THEY FOLLOW RELATIVELY CONSISTENT AND PRAGMATIC POLICIES FIRMLY GROUNDED ON THEIR OWN PERCEPTIONS OF REALITY AND CAREFULLY CALCULATED IN TERMS OF THEIR PERCEIVED CAPABILITIES.

4. GOALS:THE PRINCIPAL GOALS OF THE REGIME, APART FROM SURVIVAL, ARE TO INCREASE THE GENERAL STANDARD OF LIVING, ACHIEVE NATIONAL FREEDOM OF ACTION AND TO GAIN INTERNATIONAL STATURE AND PRESTIGE.

5. THE REGIME BELIEVES THAT IT IS NOW WELL SITUATED TO MOVE IRAQ TOWARD THE REALIZATION OF ITS CONSIDERABLE POTENTIAL. IRAQ HAS A LONG HISTORY OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT OF ITS MANY NATURAL ASSETS - OIL, LAND, WATER, AN EDUCATED ELITE, A BASIC TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE AND A MANAGEABLE POPULATION DENSITY. THE REGIME IS DETERMINED TO SUPPLY THE MISSING FACTOR - ORGANIZATION - BY WHATEVER COMBINATION OF COERCION AND INCENTIVES THE SITUATION REQUIRES. POLITICAL IDEOLOGY - WHILE AN IMPORTANT TOOL FOR SHAPING THE ACTIONS OF THE MASSES, PARTICULARLY THE YOUNGER MORE ACTIVIST ELEMENTS- WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO INTERFERE WITH THE DRIVE TOWARDS THE BASIC GOALS. THE LEADERSHIP DISPLAYS A PRAGMATIC IMPARTIALITY

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IN BUYING, BORROWING OR STEALING WHATEVER CAN BE ADOPTED FROM BOTH THE EAST AND THE WEST AND THEY ARE QUITE WILLING TO COMBINE MARXIST DIALECTIC WITH AMERICAN MANAGEMENT METHODS IF THIS WILL HELP ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS.

6. ARAB ISSUES: THE CONFLICT BETWEEN IDEOLOGY AND PRAGMATISM OCCURS MOST STRONGLY ON THE EMOTIONAL ISSUES INVOLVING ISRAEL AND THE REGIME'S RELATIONS WITH THE "HERETICAL"

SYRIAN BAATH LEADERSHIP. ON ISRAEL, THE REGIME, HAVING NO LAND TO RECOVER AND LITTLE FEAR OF AN ISRAELI INVASION, CAN AFFORD TO INDULGE ITSELF IN NEAR HYSTERICAL RHETORIC. UNLIKE THE COUNTRIES BORDERING ISRAEL, IT DOES NOT NEED THE ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED STATES TO ACHIEVE ITS CURRENT MIDDLE EAST OBJECTIVES AND CAN THUS AFFORD TO REMAIN OFFICIALLY COOL TO THE U.S. AND TO FLAUNT ITS ARABISM BY HOLDING OUT AGAINST THE RESUMPTION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE USG. AT THE SAME TIME IT OPENS ITS DOORS TO AMERICAN PRIVATE FIRMS IF IT PERCEIVES AN ECONOMIC ADVANTAGE IN DOING SO AND IS WILLING TO DO BUSINESS WITH THE USG ON A QUIET, DE FACTO BASIS THROUGH INTEREST SECTIONS AND LOWER LEVEL OFFICIALS.

7. EVEN ON ARAB-ISRAELI ISSUES, A CAREFUL OBSERVER CAN DETECT A PRAGMATIC RESTRAINT AND A DESIRE ON THE PART OF THE GOVERNMENT TO KEEP ITS OPTIONS OPEN. FOR EXAMPLE, THE GOVERNMENT HAS NEVER OFFICIALLY DENOUNCED THE RECENT ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN AGREEMENT ALTHOUGH THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE BAATH PARTY IN BAGHDAD AND THE GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED PRESS HAVE BEEN QUITE OUTSPOKEN IN ATTACKING THE AGREEMENT AS A SELL-OUT OF ARAB RIGHTS. WHEN LIBYAN PRIME MINISTER JALLOUD VISITED BAGHDAD TO ORGANIZE A "REJECTIONIST" FRONT HE APPARENTLY RECEIVED A COOL RECEPTION AND THE FINAL COMMUNIQUE WAS CAREFUL TO ATTRIBUTE "REJECTIONIST" STATEMENTS TO JALLOUD BUT NOT TO THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT. THE GOVERNMENT HAS THUS POSITIONED ITSELF FOR A POSSIBLE VOLTE FACE IF ITS INTERESTS SO REQUIRE, WHILE, AT THE SAME TIME, THE PARTY AND THE PRESS HAVE LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR AN ALL OUT ASSAULT ON THE HATED SYRIAN REGIME IF IT FOLLOWS IN EGYPT'S FOOTSTEPS.

8. SYRIAN-IRAQI RELATIONS:RELATIONS WITH SYRIA PROBABLY PRODUCE THE MOST TROUBLESOME FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES FOR THE IRAQI REGIME. THEIR RELATIONS ARE STRAINED NOT ONLY BY THE
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NORMAL PERSONAL RIVALRIES BETWEEN TWO GROUPS OF TOUGH, AMBITIOUS AND RUTHLESS MEN, BOTH HUNGRY FOR PAN-ARAB POLITICAL LEADERSHIP, BUT THEIR RELATIONSHIP ALSO INVOLVES AN ELEMENT OF THE PARTICULARLY VEHEMENT HATRED THE TRUE BELIEVER HOLDS FOR THE HERETIC. WHILE THE IRAQIS NO DOUBT FEEL THAT THEY ARE THE NATURAL LEADERS, A ROLE THAT WILL INEVITABLY BE RECOGNIZED WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR MORE ABUNDANT RESOURCES AND THE REASSERTION OF THE TRADITIONAL CULTURAL DOMINANCE OF THE PEOPLE OF THE MESOPOTAMIAN VALLEY, THEY ALSO ARE FORCED TO RECOGNIZE THAT THE SYGSAHS HOLD MANY TRUMP CARDS, INCLUDING AN UPSTREAM LOCATION ON THE ALL IMPORTANT EUPHRATES WATER SUPPLY, CONTROL OF THE IRAQI OIL PIPELINE TO THE MEDITERRANEAN AND CONTROL OVER IMPORTANT LAND AND AIR TRANSPORTATION ROUTES. THE IRAQI REGIME IS ALSO IMPALED ON THE HORNS OF A DELEMMA WHEN FACED WITH THE

NECESSITY OF SUPPORTING ITS ARCH RIVAL MILITARILY IN ORDER
TO PROTECT ITS ARAB CREDENTIALS.

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AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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9. OUTLOOK BY MOST OBJECTIVE CRITERIA, THE IRAQI REGIME WOULD
APPEAR TO BE WELL ON THE WAY TOWARDS POLITICAL STABILITY AND
ECONOMIC SUCCESS. THERE IS NOT DOUBT THE REGIME IS FIRMLY IN
CONTROL AND BAGHDAD HAS AN OPTIMISTIC, BOOM-TOWN ATMOSPHERE
THAT MUST BLUNT THE DISSATISFACTION THAT THE REGIME'S
REPRESSIVE POLICIES WOULD OTHERWISE GENERATE. BUT EXPERIENCED
OBSERVERS OF THE ARAB WORLD ARE WONDERING WHETHER THE REGIME
WILL SUCCEED IN ITS OBJECTIVE OF IMPOSING AN EFFICIENT,
DISCIPLINED, AND THUS PROFOUNDLY UN-ARAB SOCIAL ORDER ON THIS
ANCIENT LAND WITH ITS MOSAIC OF CUGOURAL TRADITIONS AND ITS
DEEP INTERNAL DIVISIONS BETWEEN KURDS AND ARABS, SUNNIS AND
SHIAS AND TRADITIONALISTS AND MODERN MAN. IN THE PAST BOTH

POLITICAL STABILITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT HAVE PROVED
UNUSUALLY DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE IN IRAQ AND THE PRESENT REGIME
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MAY YET FIND THAT ITS AMBITIONS ARE MORE THAN ITS CAPABILITIES.

10. U.S. INTERESTS IN THE NEAR FUTURE: IRAQ'S MOST OBVIOUS
POINT OF IMPACT ON U.S. INTERESTS LIES IN ITS CONFLICT WITH
THE SYRIAN REGIME AND ITS WILLINGNESS TO ATTACK SYRIA FOR
NEGOTIATING ANOTHER WITHDRAWAL AGREEMENT WITH ISRAEL. THIS
WILL CERTAINLY HAVE AN INHIBITING EFFECT ON SYRIA'S WILL-
INGNESS TO NEGOTIATE. AT THE SAME TIME, THE IRAQI REGIME
SEEMS TO BE MORE INTERESTED IN LAMBASTING THE SYRIANS THAN
IN BLOCKING PROGRESS TOWARDS AN ARAB-ISRAELI SETTLEMENT PER
SE. DESPITE THE IRRESPONSIBLE RHETORIC OF THE BAGHDAD PRESS,
THE REGIME HAS BEEN CAREFUL TO MAINTAIN A DISTANCE FROM THE
ALL-OUT REJECTIONISTS AND THE ATTACKS ON EGYPT FOR THE
SINAI AGREEMENT, AS OPPOSED TO THE ATTACKS ON HXTRIA (FOR
EVEN CONSIDERING SUCH AN AGREEMENT) HAVE BEEN QUITE MILD.
THE REGIME SEEMS TO REALIZE THAT ANOTHER WAR WOULD JEOPARDIZE
ITS BOOMING ECONOMIC LINKS WITH THE WEST, SET BACK ITS
DEVELOPMENT TIMETABLE, AND FORCE IRAQ INTO GREATER DEPENDENCE
ON RUSSIA. WHILE THE IRAQIS WILL CERTAINLY ATTACK THE
SYRIAN REGIME AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY, THEY MIGHT MODERATE
THEIR VEHEMENCE SOMEWHAT IF THEY REACH THE CONCLUSION THAT
THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE TO SYRIAN NEGOTIATION IS WAR. IN
THIS CONNECTION, IT SHOULD BE REMEMBERED THAT IRAQ WAS THE
ONE ARAB COUNTRY THAT PUBLICLY AND OFFICIALLY REFUSED TO
PARTICIPATE IN THE 1973 OIL BOYCOTT. EVEN ON THE SUBJECT OF
ISRAEL, IRAQIS SEEM TO BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN SOME SENSE OF
PRAGMATIC REALISM WHEN THEIR ECONOMIC INTERESTS ARE INVOLVED.

11. ON THE SUBJECT OF BILATERAL US-IRAQI RELATIONS, THERE
SEEMS TO BE LITTLE EVIDENCE OF ANY IMMINENT CHANGE. AS
LONG AS THE LACK OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS DOES NOT PREVENT
IRAQ FROM ESTABLISHING THE COMMERCIAL LINKS IT DESIRES WITH
U.S. FIRMS, THERE WOULD SEEM TO BE LITTLE INCENTIVE TO RENEW.
THE PRESENT SITUATION HAS THE ADVANTAGE OF PERMITTING IRAQ
TO MAINTAIN A HOLIER-THAN-THOU STANCE WITH THE OTHER ARABS
ON A CENTRAL POINT OF ARAB NATIONALIST THEOLOGY. AT THE
SAME TIME THIS DISPLAY OF DOCTRINAL PURITY DOES NOT PREVENT
IRAQ FROM ENJOYING THE SATISFACTION OF MORE WORLDLY
ECONOMIC INTERCOURSE WITH THE U.S. ECONOMY.

12. RELATIONS WITH IRAN AND THE GULF: IRAQ'S RELATIONS
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WITH IRAN AND THE OTHER GULF STATES DO NOT NOW SEEM TO BE
AT THE FOREFRONT OF IRAQI CONCERNS, ALTHOUGH THE POTENTIAL
FOR SERIOUS CONFLICT OBVIOUSLY EXISTS. I HOPE TO HAVE MORE
TO SAY ON THESE ASPECTS OF IRAQI FOREIGN POLICY IN FUTURE REPORTS.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS: SO FAR I HAVE DETECTED NO AREAS WHERE
I BELIEVE WE SHOULD SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGE U.S. POLICIES
TOWARDS IRAQ. WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO ENCOURAGE BROADER DE
FACTO GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNMENT RELATIONS BY INCREASING THE
USINT STAFF IN BAGHDAD AND UPGRADING USINT'S PRESENT ARCHAIC
COMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES. WE SHOULD ENCOURAGE PRIVATE
BUSINESS LINKS WITH IRAQ, BOTH FOR THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS TO
THE U.S. ECONOMY, AND TO INCREASE IRAQ'S STAKE IN
PEACEFUL RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES. WE SHOULD
AVOID PUSHING TOO HARD IN OUR CONTACTS WITH THE IRAQIS.
PROGRESS WILL BE SURER AND FASTER IF WE LET THEM COME TO
US AND THE TRENDS SEEM TO BE IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.
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